

Making special spaces in a Fredonia home

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Nonprofit group creates dream bedrooms for ailing girl, her sister

The bedrooms of two Fredonia girls underwent dramatic makeovers last week, when volunteers from the nonprofit organization Special Spaces visited the home of Tim and Charlene Landing.

Tori Landing, 9, a student at Ozaukee Elementary School, now has a colorful tree and fluttering butterflies painted on her bedroom wall, with accents of pink and light green. There's also new carpeting, color coordinated bedding and a remote-controlled ceiling fan.



The room of her sister Tammy, 12, features display space for her archery equipment and sports trophies, reflecting her interest in all things outdoors.

Plenty of storage options were also added, allowing for some serious decluttering of the house.

“It is just awesome” said the girls’ mother, Charlene.

Tori, who suffers from Rett syndrome, loved watching the bustle of activity while volunteer carpenters, electricians and muralists began to scurry about the home on St. Rose Avenue the previous weekend.

The finishing touches were applied while the girls were at school last Monday.

“I was told I had to leave the house by 8:30 a.m. so they could finish the work,” Mrs. Landing said.

The Monday crew included volunteers from Northwestern Mutual Life in Milwaukee. They wanted to take part in a community service “work day” in observance of Martin Luther King Day.

The results were overwhelming.

“After seeing everything they did, my heart is just glowing for Tori when you consider all that she has been cheated out of as a child. It has really raised our spirits around here,” Mrs. Landing said.

Her mother said Tori was a typical baby who started to undergo drastic behavioral changes at around 18 months.

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“She was in constant motion, and then something changed and she stopped doing anything,” Mrs. Landing said.

It took 10 months before doctors diagnosed the problem as Rett syndrome, a neurological disorder that is largely seen in young girls. By altering brain function, it can play havoc with a child’s speech, moods, breathing and eating.

The developmental condition has confined Tori to a wheelchair and keeps her on oxygen most of the day.

“On a good day, she can be snuggly and very involved ... just a sweet girl,” her mother said.

The disorder requires ongoing therapy. It was the staff at Ozaukee Therapy Services in Mequon that provided the impetus for the bedroom redecorating.

“The therapy staff said they wanted to remake Tori’s bedroom for Christmas, but things kept getting in the way,” Mrs. Landing said.

Eventually, the staff connected the family with Special Spaces, a Mequon agency that creates dream bedrooms for children with health issues as well as their siblings.

The local organization is operated by Kathy Schmidt, taking full advantage of many of the professional contacts she has through her family business, Embassy Homes.

After a couple visits with the family to consult with the girls and take measurements of their rooms, the construction days were scheduled by Special Spaces.

Mrs. Landing said Tori was having a bad day when she got home and first saw the redecorated room, but her excitement was hard to hide.

“I know she loved the tree and having her name on the wall. When Tammy saw her room, she just cried she was so happy,” their mother said.

“When I walk down the hall past their rooms, I get such a warm, contented feeling.”

Families looking to connect with Special Spaces, or interested volunteers, can contact Schmidt at (414) 801-6320 or e-mail kathy@embassyhomes.com.

Image Information:TORI LANDING AND her mother Charlene (above) were overwhelmed when they walked into their St. Rose Avenue home to see the transformation made by the nonprofit

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group Special Spaces. Volunteers from Northwestern Mutual Insurance (lower left) observed Martin Luther King Day by lending a helping hand with the makeover. A full-scale tree was painted on Tori's bedroom wall. Photos courtesy of Special Spaces